

*Tachyeres brachydactyla* and the Kelp Goose *Ch. hybrida* are both thriving in coastal squares. Three species of gulls show very different levels of abundance.

The Barn Owl *Tyto alba* was proved to breed for the first time during the survey. It nests in dense European Gorse *Ulex europaeus* which was introduced about a century ago as cattle fencing. Pellet analysis shows that the introduced feral House Mouse *Mus domesticus* is the main prey animal. In contrast, a very tame endemic race of the Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus* (the Tussacbird), cannot survive with rats, mice or cats but is numerous on coasts of outer islands. Similarly, the endemic Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi*, first described at a B.O.C. meeting in 1909, is found only on offshore Tussac islands without mammalian predators, and is now classed as **Vulnerable**. Its susceptibility is probably linked to its habit of feeding and nesting at or below ground level. Records of feral cats *Felis catus*, Common Rats *Rattus norvegicus* and House Mice show the wide distribution of these introduced predators.

The Falklands may hold the majority of the world population of the Black-throated Finch *Melanodeva melanodera*. It is present in good numbers, though classed as **Near-threatened** because continental birds are declining, through destruction of habitat. A very unusual, tame and inquisitive bird of prey, the Striated Caracara *Phalco baenus australis*, also **Near-threatened**, is recovering slightly after more than a century of persecution as a pest of sheep farming. It breeds on offshore islands with albatross and penguin colonies, and has a very restricted distribution in extreme southern South America. The Falklands, with about 600 pairs, hold the majority of its population.

The Atlas discusses the conservation implications of environmental factors, including offshore fishing, probable oil extraction developments and imminent revision of local wildlife protection legislation, for all breeding species. A recent collection of bird bones from peat deposits on West Point Island may give evidence of the occurrence of species now absent, and radiocarbon dating would make an impressive difference to knowledge of the history of Falkland Islands birds.

In thanking Robin for his talk, the Chairman introduced Mrs Anne Brown, Secretary of Falklands Conservation (Robin's guest), who joined in the subsequent lively question and discussion period.

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The eight hundred and seventieth meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 15 July 1997 at 6.15 p.m. 27 Members and 9 guests attended.

Members present were: The Rev. T. W. GLADWIN (*Chairman*), Miss H. BAKER, C. R. BARLOW, J. W. BARRINGTON, D. M. BRADLEY, P. J. BULL, Cdr M. B. CASEMENT RN, Dr R. A. CHEKE, Dr R. A. F. COX, R. B. CHILDRESS, D. J. FISHER, F. M. GAUNTLETT, A GIBBS, D. GRIFFIN, J. A. JOBLING, R. H. KETTLE, M. B. LANCASTER, D. J. MONTIER, Mrs A. M. MOORE, Mrs M. N. MULLER, Dr R. P. PRYS-JONES, N. J. REDMAN, R. E. SCOTT, N. H. F. STONE and C. W. R. STOREY.

Guests attending were: T. APPLETON (*Speaker*), M. BRADLEY, Mrs J. BULL, Mrs S. CHILDRESS, Mrs J. M. GLADWIN, Mrs M. H. GAUNTLETT, P. J. MOORE, C. A. MULLER and Mrs S. STONE.

On completion, Tim Appleton gave an illustrated talk entitled "From Greenfields to Ramsar" about the history and development of Rutland Water.

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The eight hundred and seventy-first meeting of the Club was held on Tuesday 16 September 1997 at 6.15 p.m. 25 Members and 13 guests attended.

Members present were: Mrs A. M. MOORE (*Chairman*), G. E. GREEN (*Speaker*), Miss H. BAKER, J. W. BARRINGTON, P. J. BELMAN, I. R. BISHOP, D. R. CALDER, Cdr M. B. CASEMENT RN, F. M. GAUNTLETT, D. GRIFFIN, J. A. JOBLING, R. H. KETTLE, Dr C. F. MANN, D. J. MONTIER, Mrs M. N. MULLER, R. G. MORGAN, P. J. OLIVER, Dr W. G. PORTEOUS, Dr R. P. PRYS-JONES, N. J. REDMAN, P. G. W. SALAMAN, Dr D. W. SNOW, S. A. H. STATHAM, N. H. F. STONE and G. THOMAS.

Guests attending were: Ms G. BONHAM, Mrs J. B. CALDER, D. GANDY, T. EVANS, Mrs M. H. GAUNTLETT, Mr & Mrs D. B. ILES, Mrs M. MONTIER, P. J. MOORE, R. RANFT, Dr B. M. ROGERS, Mrs K. SALAMAN, and Mrs B. K. SNOW.

On completion, Graeme Green gave an illustrated talk entitled "Cotingas and their niche in the neotropical avifauna".

The cotingas as a group reflect the diversity which is typical of the Neotropical avifauna in general. The geological history of the Americas is such that there are many

centres of avian endemism, both lowland and montane, and many cotingas are endemic to just one of these areas. This endemism and resultant dependence on one discrete area makes these cotingas vulnerable to habitat modification. This factor has perhaps reached its nadir in the rampant destruction of the Atlantic forests of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, where perhaps only 4% of primary forests remain. Whether this is sufficient habitat for viable populations to survive may be answered sooner rather than later. Also, it is not just these discrete areas of endemism where habitat modification is such a problem; the whole of the eastern slope of the Andes is under threat of complete forest clearance outside protected areas, particularly within the elevational range suitable for agriculture based on cash crops such as sun coffee and marijuana.

Hindering our understanding of the possible consequences to the Neotropical avifauna in general, and cotingas in particular, of this habitat modification is the fundamental lack of baseline data for many Neotropical birds. The ground-breaking efforts of many ornithologists such as Frank Chapman, Alexander Skutch, and others, has developed into a modern field-orientated ornithological movement. This growing cadre of field ornithologists may become crucial in gathering sufficient information on the birds of the Neotropics to help decision-makers to avert further extinctions.

The increasing understanding of the crucial role that vocalisations play in the lives of Neotropical birds has led to vast collections of taped vocalisations being housed in various institutions, where they are accessible to researchers. There are also more commercial tapes appearing on the market, and these can also be extremely useful in increasing researchers' knowledge of the avifauna. Cotingas exhibit a wide repertoire of vocalisations, ranging from the woeful and near-mute to the spectacular. Knowledge of their vocalisations is a useful tool in mapping distributions of these birds, as many are attracted to tape playback, or whistled imitations, of their vocalisations. For example, the Elegant Mourner *Laniisoma elegans* (the erstwhile Shrike-like Cotinga), has a distribution centred on the Atlantic Forests of Brazil from where, it is speculated, it colonised the eastern slope of the Andes of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela (Snow 1982). The vocalisation of the Atlantic Forest taxon of this species, *L. e. elegans* is now widely known (indeed, it is now commercially available), and this has led to more data being gathered about the taxon, which can be extremely difficult to observe, during fieldwork in the region. Consequently, the belief among many ornithologists is that this taxon is both more widespread, and less rare, than formerly considered.

The Atlantic Forests of Brazil harbour several other cotingas with interesting vocalisations. Anyone who has heard the ululating, high-pitched and far-carrying whistle of the Black-and-Gold Cotinga *Tijuca atra* will not forget its ventriloquial quality. Another characteristic (and beautiful) cotinga of the region, the Hooded Berryeater *Carpornis cucullatus* has a vocalisation which has earned it the onomatopoeic name 'coracacho'; indeed it is perhaps the characteristic call of the wetter forests of the Serra do Mar. The rediscovery in the region in 1996 of the feared-extinct Kinglet *Calyptura calyptura cristat* is a fitting reward for the efforts of the fieldworkers in the region, and epitomises the requirements for solid, and at times monotonous data-gathering in the cause of conservation of these wonderful and spectacular birds.

#### Erratum:

In the account by Prof. Richard Chandler *Bulletin* 117 (3), p. 158, a sentence was omitted. The following sentence should be inserted before the last sentence in paragraph 2: "The two forms also differ in both orbital ring (narrow and yellow-orange in *fuliginosus*, fleshy, broad and orange-yellow in *ophthalmicus*) and claw colour (orange in *fuliginosus* and black in *ophthalmicus*)."

## Subspeciation in Layard's Tit-babbler of the southwestern Afrotropics

by P. A. Clancey

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The tit-babblers *Parisoma subcaeruleum* and *P. layardi* form a small unit of sympatric species endemic to the South African Sub-Region, where they affect the *Acacia* savanna biome. They are thought to be closely related to the Old World warblers of the genus *Sylvia*. While both South African species are broadly sympatric, *P. layardi* is the less common of the pair and is confined to the extreme west and the south of their joint range, which extends from southwestern Angola, the mid-Zambezi drainage and the plateau of Zimbabwe, south to the Cape and western Natal in the Republic of South Africa. The other species currently treated as congeneric are *P. buryi* of southwestern Arabia, and *P. lugens* and *P. boehmi* of the northeast and eastern parts of Africa. *P. buryi* is monotypic, while *P. lugens* and *P. boehmi* are moderately polytypic, as are *subcaeruleum* and *layardi*. While the two southern African forms are sympatric and share the same *Acacia* biome, they are, nevertheless, moderately differentiated ecologically, with *layardi* found in broken, hill country with tracts of rocky terrain.

In the west of its range, *layardi* is present along the western seaboard at sea level, but in the extreme east, in the highlands of Lesotho, it affects high country, breeding to elevations in excess of 2500 m and reaching the alpine summit of the high Drakensberg. From the ecological point of view it is significant that in the west of the range precipitation levels are low, being *c.* 120 mm annually, whereas in the extreme east the birds espouse an environment which experiences a rainfall of *c.* 600–1500 mm.

Traylor, in his 1986 appraisal of subspeciation in *P. subcaeruleum* and *P. layardi*, admitted four subspecies for both species. While I have no cause for cavil over the four subspecies admitted in *subcaeruleum*, the recognition of four in *P. layardi* calls for reconsideration, and is critically reassessed hereunder.

With its limited range, *P. layardi* has invited a limited measure of interest on the part of systematists. The first worker to describe a form in *P. layardi*, which was named initially from Clanwilliam in 1862 by Hartlaub, was Vincent (1948) who, on the basis of a limited material of eight specimens from the Lesotho highlands and the small Transvaal Museum series of ten then available, separated the Lesotho birds on the basis of colour and bill-length characters. Later, Winterbottom (1958) separated a race on a comparable range of colour variables, based on five specimens from the coastlands of the western Cape and nineteen from a range of localities to the northeast in the lower Orange R. basin of the Richtersveld. Both descriptions compared a dark blue-grey-backed form with a lighter, more olivaceous-backed form (the nominate), no attempt being apparently

made to bring the two dark grey variants together in the comparisons. The geographical variation in the present *Parisoma* is relatively simple, grouping readily into two classes, one dark bluish-grey with white in the wings and over the lores, and the other olivaceous grey, without white in the wings and over the face. Birds in the former group also frequently exhibit a prominent white supra-oral spot. Strangely, neither Vincent nor Winterbottom alluded to the strong development of white over the wings and the face. This was particularly strange in the case of Vincent's highland material from Lesotho which he described as *P. l. barnesi*, these all strongly marked with white in the wings, but in the western Cape where comparable birds are seemingly confined to the dune country, of which Winterbottom had but five specimens, birds of both forms come into very close proximity to one another.

The finding of two widely sundered populations showing closely comparable suites of characters in *P. layardi* follows a comparable trend in a number of Cape endemics, notably *Promerops cafer*/*P. gurneyi*, *Chaetops frenatus*/*Ch. aurantius* and *Pseudochloroptila pseudochloroptila*/*P. symonsi*. However, unlike the listed endemics, the forms here discussed are not even subspecifically differentiated. In the present case there is no ready ecological interpretation, as western birds occupy scrub along the southwestern Cape coast and eastern birds are typical for the species.

The second variant population, differentiated from the dark bluish birds already dealt with, is more olive-tinged over the dorsal surface and wings, and moreover lacks white over the remiges and usually the face, which surfaces are olive-grey. On the underside they differ little from the blue-grey birds though tending to show more white medio-ventrally. To such elements Winterbottom applied the name *P. l. aridicola*, the type a bird taken at Noisabis in the Richtersveld. A critical examination reveals that birds agreeing taxonomically with *aridicola* extend far to the south of the Richtersveld and the basin of the lower Orange R., where they lie in juxtaposition with dark birds confined to the dunes along the coast to the west. Birds agreeing in such characters were collected at a range of localities extending from Kamiesberg to Calvinia and Citrusdal. Some were identified by Winterbottom in 1958 as *aridicola*, which raises the question of the status of *aridicola* as being other than a junior synonym of *layardi*, proposed on a Clanwilliam specimen. In essence, this would deprive the present *layardi* of a name, which can however be met by seeing the latter as congruent with the eastern highland taxon as part of *P. l. barnesi*.

A further name requires to be considered, *P. l. subsolanum* Clancey, 1963: Aprilskraal siding, near Molteno, northeastern Cape. This is not a particularly sharply defined subspecies, but is seen as a connecting link between the two dark well-characterised southern populations of *P. l. barnesi* in having the breast and sides darker, yet lacking any marked white in the wings and face, and can be gainfully employed for the population of "n nominate *layardi*-type" birds present throughout the southern mountains and Karoo of the Cape.

Nominate *P. l. layardi* extends from the central and southern parts of Namibia south to the northwest of the Cape in the basin of the lower